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National Press Club

Women Back in Balcony

Press Club Reverses Lunch Coverage Policy

The governing board of the National Press Club reversed its luncheon coverage policy last night and again banned non-member newsmen—including newswomen—to the tiny balcony of the club's great ballroom.

The vote was 6-to-5, with only club vice president Clark Mollenhoff of the Des Moines Register & Tribune switching position.

A 6-to-3 vote several weeks ago—with two board members absent—had opened the ballroom floor to working non-member reporters covering the speeches of visiting dignitaries and heads of state.

Mollenhoff said after the board's meeting that his first vote had been "reluctant" and "wrong" but that he had "corrected" his "convictions" with last night's ballot.

His switch, he said, could be traced to "certain pressures that were relative to some governmental figures . . . tampering around in the press club."

Club president Joseph A. Dear of Dear Publications said after the meeting that he knew of no direct governmental efforts to pressure the club. He acknowledged reports of such efforts, however, and said there were some indications that speakers were being

steered away from the club's microphones.

The regrettable thing about last night's vote, Dear said, was the "erosion" of the club's status as an example-setting for the Nation's journalists.

"We should set the example of how coverage should be provided," he said. "This is what really counts."

Washington's newswomen long have complained of their banishment to the balcony of the all-male club. They even have elicited statements of sympathy from former President Kennedy and from President Johnson.

Male non-members assigned to cover luncheon speakers have been less vocal than the women, perhaps remembering worse situations.

The president of the Women's National Press Club, Elsie Carper of The Washington Post, called last night's reversal vote "regretable."

"It has been our position," she said, "that press events should be open to all accredited correspondents without discrimination."